

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### VIKING TOOL AND GAGE

Northwest Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center

#### Viking Tool And Gage Manages Growth With Lean Manufacturing

##### Client Profile:

Viking Tool and Gage, a metal fabricator located in Conneaut Lake, Pennsylvania, specializes in aluminum fabrication from prototype to production, including finishing and assembly. The company fabricates three million pounds of aluminum extrusions annually, and is experienced in many processes including sawing, stamping, drilling, CNC machining, and vibratory deburr. Viking Tool and Gage has been ISO 9002 and QS-9000 registered for six years and currently has nearly 75 employees in a 50,000 square foot facility.

##### Situation:

When Jack Burns, the new president of Viking Tool and Gage, stepped in, he was concerned with the quality of the workforce. Mr. Burns wanted his tooling firm to not only compete with but also outperform other quality firms. He made a determination to establish an aggressive improvement program, focusing specifically on the skills and quality of the workforce, and contacted the Northwest Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center (NWIRC), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for assistance.

##### Solution:

NWIRC regularly hosts seminars on the basic principles of lean manufacturing, and after attending one such seminar, Viking Tool and Gage's executives decided the whole company would benefit from this type of training. They saw that the concepts of lean manufacturing would encourage employees to gain a heightened awareness of ways they could improve their own efficiencies. Every employee received eight hours of lean manufacturing training from NWIRC.

NWIRC customized the training based on three critical areas of focus outlined by Mr. Burns. First, NWIRC emphasized the fact that a company doesn't make money from handling materials. By moving material to the next station as soon as it is cut, rather than taking it to a staging area first, the employees could make significant improvements in productivity. Environmental concerns also took a precedence in NWIRC's training. Despite the fact that Viking Tool and Gage had already computerized all of its operations, it still produced hard-copy reports that wasted paper and took up space and value time. NWIRC suggested that the company eliminate paper altogether; employees now communicate with one another by e-mail. Finally, NWIRC discussed the idea that set-up time cuts into production time. After grasping the concept, Viking Tool and Gage's employees made major efforts to re-position equipment to make the

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workflow more logical, and have also established point-of-use storage and labeling of tools to improve organization and save time.

After the employees completed their training, they came up with more than 30 suggestions on ways to perform their tasks faster and more efficiently, suggestions that have helped the company to produce more pieces per hour. Some suggestions involved cleanliness and comfort, and the company followed through on these as well. Viking Tool and Gage now encourages ongoing communication and feedback. Because Viking Tool & Gage is a profit-sharing company, employees are interested in coming up with ideas that will make the company more profitable.

Four managers are now taking advanced training so that Viking Tool & Gage can keep its improvement momentum. Approximately 30 new employees will be receiving lean training, and the company plans to enroll all employees in refresher classes or advanced classes to keep skills sharp and ideas fresh.

### **Results:**

Trained 75 employees in lean manufacturing concepts.  
Changed methods, frequency, and quality of communications.  
Improved efficiency to increase throughput.  
Improved workflow and organization in the plant.

### **Testimonial:**

"I see improvements continually, as evidenced by higher profits and higher productivity. The training [provided by the Northwest Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center] was worthwhile."

Terry Miller, Human Resources Manager